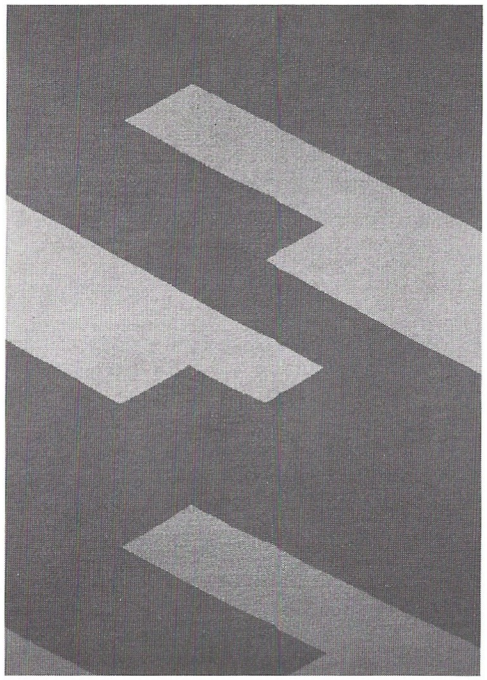

Woven wool tapestry by Lesley Millar: Dark yellow, green and rust, 210 x 109 cm. £375. Photograph by Joel Degen.

quilting, embroidery, felt, and painted and constructed pieces. There are some things obviously that maintain both possibilities, wall or floor, such as Lesley Millar's striking geometric rug shown here.

THE BRITISH CRAFTS CENTRE
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MONDAY - FRIDAY 10-5.30, SATURDAY 11-5

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BRITISH CRAFTS CENTRE

MAY – JUNE 1985

"Red/Black Division": Floor rug by Mary Farmer, 100% wool weft, linen warp, 234 x 122 cm. Photograph by Joel Degen.

MARY FARMER TAPESTRIES
TERRY MOORES CERAMICS

3 May to 1 June

When two artists are married to each other, in the same place, or even close by, the temptation is always there to read too much into the circumstance, and look for connections in the work itself where none necessarily exist. But temptation, pace Oscar Wilde, is not always to be resisted, and in the particular case of Mary Farmer, the tapestry maker, and Terry Moores, the potter, while not indulging it too far, it is reasonable to point certain qualities in common. And above all, which quality colours and conditions all others, there is the technical integrity of their respective practice, by which nothing is sacrificed to easy effect, and all experiment, all question and decision resolved beforehand in the long processes of a continual engagement with their respective disciplines. There is no sign of struggle, but all is subsumed in the final work: everything, in short, is beautifully made. And again, with both of them, all is done with such simplicity of form, and economy and command of means, that apparent ease belies the nature of their achievement. We must take care not to undervalue an art that is, as it were, concealed by art.

To call it art at all, though perhaps contentious, is not at all to overstate the case; for, though craft is the nominal category into which their work naturally falls, the more we consider it in either case, the more it clearly transcends the received limitations, those expected functions of containment, furniture and decoration. We can hardly do other than take it, with Moore's work, as true sculpture, with Mary Farmer's, as a kind of painting. They may both have taken to themselves particular material and method, but they have put them entirely at the service not of mere function, but of their personal experience and its expression. The argument as to whether or not the craftsman may or should aspire to the condition of artist is well enough rehearsed, but the simple point to take is that the artist is free to exploit whatever means, of medium and method, that chance or decision put in his way that are yet appropriate to his needs and intentions: and they may quite as well be clay glazed and cooked, or thread on a loom, as paint, canvas, wood or stone.

Mary Farmer's tapestries and rugs are disarmingly matter-of-fact and simple; and they have something about them of the character of the earliest heraldry, which is to say the simplest and most directly effective. She uses sometimes an abstract, basic geometric figure against a ground, more commonly an asymmetrically divided field; and the device is indeed still as effective in fixing the attention as was that proto-hard-edge post-painterly abstraction of the age of chivalry. While never being much more than one or two colours set in or against another, each work stands also most unequivocally a potent emblem and object, to be regarded on its own terms and for its own sake. We must not overdo the atavism; but those who look to art only for anecdote or description might do worse than remember the simple power that colour judiciously deployed and clearly stated has always been known to possess. Dressed up as badge, banner or flag, it has caught the imagination and commanded respect, and little need have changed by a mere change of designation, or somewhat more ambiguous an intention. Not calling it art directly may help, of course, to deflect prejudice against abstraction, and Mary Farmer is well placed, and discreet enough, to take advantage without in any sense compromising herself in her work, by its nominal function as

furnishing and decoration. These things may thus be allowed to creep up on their public unawares, that would never take to self-proclaimed modern art - and so by Grandmother's footsteps the cause advances.

Terry Moore's work is of two distinct kinds: pots that for all their obvious sculptural qualities remain pots nevertheless, and the rather taller ceramic slabs, some three feet high, for which the only word available is sculpture. But pot or slab, each piece is made for itself, but is then set up in relation to one or more of its fellows, as though it were an element in a group of standing stones or perhaps, in the case of the pots especially, a clump of some rather more organic growth. The pots are of an irregular shape, squeezed smoothly out of the circular, and bent, or rather folded over, in the manner almost of a top boot flopping gently to one side, or perhaps something like the form of the lower leg bending relaxedly through the knee to the lower thigh. But this is not to impose too close a description, for these works of either kind are no more than simply themselves, and if they trigger the imagination in a certain way, so be it. The slabs lean and bend too, just off the perpendicular, somewhat askew, neither an informal architecture exactly, nor quite natural, but poised delicately between the two and carrying most certainly the implications of cool deliberation and decision.

It is all stoneware, slab and pot, high fired 'T' material glazed ambiguously to a silky finish, for the appearance is dry, even subtly abrasive to the eye, and the sensation is unexpected. The colour is severely restrained, low and close toned, a quiet, mottled surface of stone grays that modulate from warm to cool all but imperceptibly. These things stand thus enigmatically together, intriguing the imagination and full of possibilities - impassive, self-possessed and very beautiful.

William Packer

Cover: "On the Wane": Tapestry by Mary Farmer, 100% wool weft, cotton warp, 107 x 107 cm. Photograph by Joel Degen.

COMING NEXT

STUDIO GLASS
12 July to 10 August

WALL HUNG TEXTILES
16 August to 14 September

Asymmetrical forms by Terry Moores: 'T' material with slip glazes, 39 and 33 cm high. Photograph by Joel Degen.

SHOP

In March Peter Niczewski showed a spectacular table covered in marquetry in the group exhibition. It had aspects of old and new - a traditional way of fancifying genteel furniture, and an oval form reminiscent of best drawing-room style; but reminiscence is disturbed by the startling modernity of the coloured veneers, the composition of pattern against pattern, and the spiral-section leg that snakes its way through the table top.

Tradition and innovation in wood will be a focus of displays this Spring. At the end of April we will be showing bowls, plates and boxes by Ray Key to coincide with the publication of his book 'Woodturning and Design'. This is a practical instructive book that explains his approach and also enthusiastically describes his work in America running workshops with native woodturners.

During June there will be a varied and changing retail display on both floors, which will include a new selection of Ciaran Forbes' turned bowls. Ciaran Forbes works in Ireland and has his workshop in Glenstall Abbey, where he is a Benedictine monk. He uses the wood that is on his doorstep - the Abbey has a 200 acre forest. He makes simple shapes with strong rims, mainly bowls with other domestic ware.

Marquetry table by Peter Niczewski: dyed and natural sycamore, 56 x 80 x 29 cm. £2,010. Photograph by Tony Hutchings.

Grey bowl by Maria van Kesteren: lathe turned, 8 cm. Photograph by Joel Degen.

Also in June we will exhibit the work of Maria van Kesteren, a very well-established woodturner from Holland whose work has not been shown in England before. She is known to quite a lot of English craftsmen and women because of her involvement with the Kapelhuis Gallery in Amersfoort, Holland, which celebrates its 25th year of operation this spring, and has been a very important influence in the promotion of new ideas in the crafts in Europe, and in its encouragement of young practitioners. Van Kesteren makes bowls and boxes that are made up of exquisite and subtle curves, some of which are felt rather than seen, forming the underhanging inner rims of bowls. She uses native woods but bleaches and stains them to a pure range of off-white, grey, and black that perfectly suits the purity of the forms. This is progressive and sophisticated work that stretches traditional expectations. Van Kesteren's work will be featured in Craft Magazine at the time of this display.

In the second half of the summer we look forward to group exhibitions of Studio Glass and Textiles. The latter will be called 'Wall-Hung Textiles' and will include weaving,